



WHO WE ARE



- Black BSW students in child welfare internships
- Part of Pennsylvania's Title IV-E (CWEB) program
- Preparing for careers in public child welfare
- 2 presenters with lived foster care experience

Different Experiences. Shared Commitment
To the Work and the Families We Serve.

OUR RESEARCH APPROACH



- Combines research, professional experience, and lived experience
- Narrative-informed reflection
- Focus areas:
 - ✓ Practice
 - ✓ Sense of belonging
 - ✓ Commitment to the field

WHY THIS MATTERS



- Black professionals are underrepresented in child welfare
- High stress, burnout and turnover rates
- Racial inequities impact both families and workers
- Workforce challenges affect outcomes for children & families.

PRACTICE

Social work practice for **Black Caseworkers** in child welfare involves a complex integration of **professional skill**, **cultural expertise**, and the **navigation of systemic racial dynamics**.

- Shared cultural background supports a more holistic understanding of family needs, leading to stronger engagement and improved outcomes for children.
- Black caseworkers often draw on their identity and lived experience as a tool for intervention, informing more equitable and culturally responsive decision-making.
- This practice includes actively challenging biased risk assessments and stereotypes, particularly those that disproportionately impact Black families, helping reduce unnecessary system involvement.
- This approach supports trauma-informed care by recognizing how individual, historical, and systemic trauma shape family experiences and responses.
- As a result, behavior is more often understood within structural and systemic contexts, rather than being attributed solely to individual deficits.

Shared culture and lived experience are not just identity. They are forms of practice knowledge that shape how caseworkers assess risk, build relationships, and advocate for families.

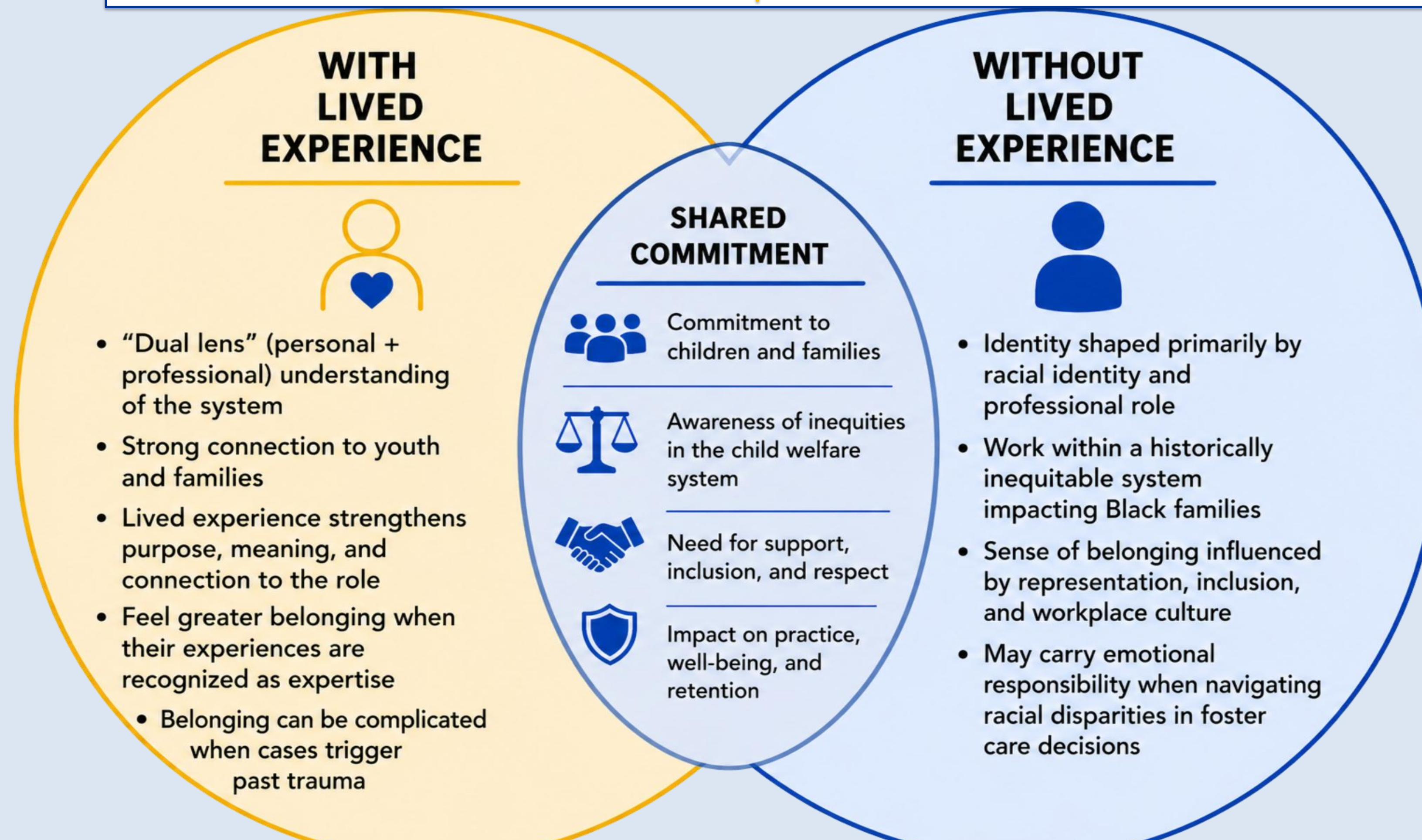
SENSE OF BELONGING

INCREASES WHEN:

- ✓ Lived experiences are valued
- ✓ Representation exists
- ✓ Supportive supervision
- ✓ Inclusive workplace culture

DECREASES WHEN:

- ✗ Experiences are dismissed
- ✗ Racism is unaddressed
- ✗ Workers feel isolated
- ✗ Lack of representation



"It is not our differences that divide us. It is our inability to recognize, accept, and celebrate those differences."
— Audre Lorde

THE RETENTION & COMMITMENT OF BLACK CASEWORKERS

Centering Identity, Experience, and Workforce Sustainability

WHY BLACK CASEWORKERS LEAVE:

- Workplace racism
- Low wages
- Lack of meaningful inclusion & perceived organizational justice
- Emotional toll of navigating racial inequities in practice
- Feeling undervalued despite cultural knowledge and lived experience
- Tokenization without meaningful support or advancement

WHY RETENTION MATTERS FOR BLACK CASEWORKERS:

- ✓ Stability for children and families
- ✓ Representation in the workforce
- ✓ Stronger cultural understanding and trust with families
- ✓ Ability to challenge bias and advocate for equitable decisions
- ✓ Supports a more inclusive and response workforce
- ✓ Lived experience strengthens engagement and empathy in practice

*Retention is not just about staffing -
It is about equity, representation, and outcomes.*

RECOMMENDATIONS

CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE SUPERVISION Provide supervision that is affirming, supportive, and culturally aware	MENTORSHIP OPPORTUNITIES Create mentorship and professional development opportunities for Black Caseworkers.
RECOGNIZE LIVED EXPERIENCE AS EXPERTISE Value lived experience as a unique strength in child welfare practice.	INCREASE ACCOUNTABILITY FOR EQUITY Hold organizations accountable for equity, inclusion, and representation